

CONCLUSIONS: happy vs. crappy endings

The conclusion to any paper is the final impression. It is the last opportunity to get your point across to the reader and leave the reader feeling as if he/she learned something. Leaving a paper “hanging” without a proper conclusion can devalue what was said in the rest of the paper.

You Want Your Conclusion to Accomplish

- A final analysis or interpretation of the main point of your paper. However, you want to avoid simply restating your thesis and topic sentences; find *new, different words* to remind your reader of your main point. Basically, you want to make one last effort to convince your reader.
- Suggest the larger implications of your topic, now that you have presented the evidence and argument.
- Provide an ending comment or closing thought that inspires your reader to keep thinking about your topic and that provides a sense of closure.

HAPPY ENDINGS: ideas for effective conclusions

Echo of the Introduction: The writer reminds the reader of the idea, story, description, etc. that the paper opened with by mentioning it again and connecting to a restatement of the thesis (using different words).

Logical Conclusion: This is a good closing for argumentative or opinion papers that present two or more sides of an issue. The conclusion drawn is the result of the research presented. For a paper arguing that universities should provide separate programs for deaf students, rather than mixing deaf students in with the general student population, the writer concludes:

As one can see from reading the information presented, mainstreaming deaf students isn't always as effective as educating them in a segregated classroom. Deaf students learn better in a more one-on-one basis like they can find in a school or program specially designed for them. Mainstreaming is just that; deaf students get lost in the mainstream.

Real or Rhetorical Question Closing: This method is like the logical conclusion, except you leave it up to the reader to draw the conclusion for himself/herself. Rather than stating the conclusion outright, you can leave the reader with a question that causes him/her to figure it out for himself.

Campaign advertisements should help us understand the candidate's qualifications and positions on the issues. Instead, most tell us what a boob or knave the opposing candidate is, or they present general images of the candidate as a family person or God-fearing American. Do such advertisements contribute to creating an informed electorate or a people who choose political leaders the same way they choose soft drinks and soap?

Speculative or Opinion Closing: This is a good style of conclusion when you have been unable to come up with direct answer or clear decision about whatever you researched.

Through all of my research, all of the people I interviewed, all of the institutions I visited, not one person could give me a clear-cut answer to my question. Can all deaf people be educated in the same manner? I couldn't find the "right" answer. I hope you, the reader, will have better luck.

Concluding by Looking to the Future or End with a Warning: Looking to the future can emphasize the importance of your paper or redirect the readers' thought process. It may help them apply the new information to their lives or see things more globally.

Without well-qualified teachers, schools are little more than buildings and equipment. If higher-paying careers continue to attract the best and the brightest students, there will not only be a shortage of teachers, but the teachers available may not have the best qualifications. Our youth will suffer. And when youth suffers, the future suffers.

Close with a Recommendation, Suggestion for a Course of Action, or Challenge to the Reader: In this kind of conclusion, the writer suggests that the reader do something to support the cause explained or argued for in the paper or pleads with them to take action on the issue discussed in the paper.

American Sign Language is a fast growing language in America. More and more universities and colleges are offering it as part of their curriculum and some are even requiring it as part of their program. This writer suggests that anyone who has a chance to learn this beautiful language should grab that opportunity.

End with a Comparison: End by putting your discussion in a different, perhaps larger, context. For example, you might end an essay on nineteenth-century muckraking journalism by linking it to a current newsmagazine program like *60 Minutes* or the news organization *National Public Radio*.

End with a Quotation or Powerful Fact/Statistic: Conclude with a quotation from or reference to a source or a striking fact or statistic that you have not yet mentioned in your paper. The quotation, fact, or statistic should amplify your main point or put it in a different perspective. A quotation from a critic or scholar or a fact or statistic that is surprising can help confirm your final point and make it memorable.

Strategies for Providing a Sense of Closure

- Conclude by linking that last paragraph to the first by reiterating a word or phrase you used at the beginning (echo of the introduction, as mentioned above).
- Conclude with a sentence mainly composed of one-syllable words. Simple language can create a dramatic effect.
- Conclude with a sentence that is parallel in structure: such sentences can establish a sense of order at the end of a complex discussion.

CRAPPY ENDINGS: conclusions to avoid

The Unnecessary Summary or the Mirror Image: Only lengthy, complex papers need a conclusion that summarizes the material covered in the paper. Don't simply repeat the thesis and summarize the main points in detail, which is a dull and mechanical conclusion and unnecessary in a paper under about 10 pages. You want to remind your reader of your thesis, but not of specific details discussed in your essay: try to offer your reader something more.

The Unnecessary Announcement: Avoid phrases like "in conclusion," "to conclude," "in summary," "to sum up," and "in conclusion, let me say..." These phrases can be useful in oral presentations, but readers can see when an essay is about to end. You'll irritate your audience by pointing out the obvious.

The Obvious Truth or Fade-Out Ending: Avoid phrases like "And as for the future, only time will tell," "We shall see what happens in regards to this issue," or something like, "Researchers have so much more to discover in this area. Whatever we say now will be superseded in the near future..." These kinds of endings will also irritate your readers because they are so obvious: of course people are going to continue thinking about these topics and we will eventually find out what the future has in store for us.

The Waste Basket Ending: Do not try to say in the final paragraph everything that you didn't have room for in the body of your paper. Don't introduce a new idea or subtopic in the concluding paragraph.

The Wild Surmise: In this kind of ending, the writer exaggerates or overstates the importance of the issue. For example: *From this, we see the utter futility of ever trying to help another person... / Therefore, as should be obvious by now, if we don't provide sex education in schools then we are as the human species are destined to die off of AIDS in the not so distant future...*

The Apology: Resist the urge to apologize. If you have immersed yourself in your topic, you know a great deal more than you could possibly include in a 5-, 10-, or even 20-page essay. As a result, by the time you have finished writing, you may be having some doubts about what you have produced. (And if you have not immersed yourself in your topic, you may be feeling even more doubtful about your essay as you approach your conclusion.) Repress those doubts. Don't undercut your authority by saying things like *This is just one approach to the subject; there may be other, better approaches...* / *I may not be an expert...* / *This is just my opinion...*